Tim Dear and Friend on Railroad Bridge, Oakland Oregon, c. 1919

Reflections

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This photo of my grandfather, Tim Dear, is from his high school photo album titled *Snapshots*. It appears to capture a school outing—possibly a picnic—with six to ten classmates, all enjoying a carefree afternoon together. Many of the surrounding images show young men and women lounging on blankets, laughing, and posing in playful group shots. In this particular photo, two boys are perched on the beam of a railroad bridge, with Tim and a close friend sitting beside him.

The bridge may have been located not far from the Dear family home—certainly somewhere in or near Oakland, Oregon—though I haven't confirmed the exact location. Regardless, the image stands out for the camaraderie it captures. The kids are clearly hamming it up for the camera, comfortable and full of life.

What makes this image especially interesting to me is the possibility that Tim—or perhaps his cousin Charles Vail—had access to a darkroom. Many of the prints in this album are unevenly cut, imperfectly processed, and quite dirty, suggesting they may have been developed at home rather than by a professional. My grandmother Blanche once mentioned that Tim had ambitions of becoming a photographer. It's possible this album reflects some of those early creative experiments.

Even the corner mounts here appear handmade—perhaps cut and folded by Tim himself. I've never seen mounts quite like them. While this is speculation on my part, it does add to the impression that the album was a personal project, shaped by the self-sufficiency and do-it-yourself attitude that was certainly necessary to life on the Dear farm in rural Oakland, Oregon. These small handmade touches feel like a quiet echo of that environment.

Some of the photos may well have been taken by Charles Vail himself, who went on to become a respected photographer in Camas, Washington and is now recognized as an early voice in Northwest photography. I'm currently scanning and preserving the entire album—roughly 140 images documenting Tim's high school years. This photo is just one glimpse into a much larger, joyful slice of Oregon life and what became of those pioneer families as the years progressed.